

VZCZCXRO2434
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHBK #2955/01 3230954
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 190954Z NOV 09
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9015
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7709
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0183
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5983
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2112
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0198
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 7304

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BANGKOK 002955

SIPDIS

NSC FOR WALTON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTHERN THAILAND: A VIOLENT WEEK, EVEN BY
SOUTHERN STANDARDS, AND ANOTHER POLITICAL PROPOSAL

REF: A. BANGKOK 02844 (CHAVALIT'S "PATTANI CITY" PROPOSAL)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 01980 (ENDURING VIOLENCE AND THE WAY
FORWARD)
[1](#)C. BANGKOK 02307 (NOT ALL VIOLENCE INSURGENT RELATED)

BANGKOK 00002955 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: It has been an active week on the southern Thai front. On November 16 and 17, there were two separate school bus shootings in Pattani. On November 17, a prolonged standoff and gunfight took place between government security forces and insurgents, ending in the death of six insurgents.

On November 18, newly-minted Mathaphum Party head and former chief of the Council for National Security (CNS, the military group that assumed power after ousting former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in the 2006 coup) retired General Sonthi Boonyaratkalin proposed yet another peace-building approach for the South, involving the creation of a "new ministry" to oversee government efforts in the region. Sonthi claimed his plan to boost local representation was more specific than Puea Thai chairman Chavalit Yongchaiyut's proposal (REF A). Fourth Army Commander Lt. Gen. Pichit Wisaijorn also made an unconvincing pitch to a mostly foreign audience November 18 for the effectiveness of the King's sufficiency economy model in tamping down violence in the South.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: The shootout in Pattani was significant; two of the insurgents killed were reportedly commanders, high-value targets. Insurgents will almost certainly respond with more attempts to kill government security forces. However, the school bus shootings serve as stark reminder of the fact that a portion of the violence in the South is unrelated to the insurgency and defies convenient labels. Even more sobering is the fact that the majority of the victims of violence in the South are neither government security personnel nor separatist fighters, but are Malay Muslim civilians, local residents simply trying to live their lives.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment, con't: The seemingly myriad proposals to resolve the southern insurgency by various political figures are more likely to gain some traction with disaffected voters in the Deep South and win electoral support in the next election cycle than to yield lasting solutions. Most of the

ideas put forward have been part of the long-running discourse of experts, politicians, and officials struggling to find a political solution that increases local participation in governance and allows space to pursue local identity within the bounds of Thailand's constitutional framework. End Summary and Comment.

SHOOTING AT KIDS: VIOLENCE HITS A NEW LOW

14. (SBU) In two separate incidents on November 16 and 17, suspected insurgents attacked school buses in Pattani Province. In the early evening of Monday, November 16 a gunman on a motorcycle fired at a school bus in Panare District. Three students between the ages of 12 and 18 were wounded, but none of their injuries were considered life-threatening. In the same district on November 8, two students were killed and three injured when assailants on a motorcycle opened fire on a crowded food stall after evening prayers at a local Islamic school. On Tuesday, November 17 in Nong Chik District, Pattani, suspected insurgents shot and killed a bus driver when he got off the bus to assist the kindergarten students he was picking up for school; none of the children were physically harmed. None of these attacks appear to have any direct connection to the insurgency, according to Human Rights Watch researcher Sunai Phasuk.

SECURITY FORCES KILL SIX INSURGENTS AFTER STANDOFF

15. (U) On the morning of November 17, ten police officers approached a house in Khok Pho District in Pattani, following a local tip that insurgents might be there. The six insurgents inside the house fired at the officers, who called

BANGKOK 00002955 002.2 OF 003

for support from the military, which arrived around noon. Authorities tried to negotiate with the six insurgents in the house, but as dusk approached, security forces used tear gas and smoke grenades to try and flush the fighters out of the house. In the ensuing gun battle, all six insurgents were killed, and four soldiers were injured. A Nation newspaper journalist "embedded" with security forces witnessed the entire standoff, providing an independent account of events.

16. (C) According to Sunai, two of the insurgents killed were juwae commanders and high-value targets for the security forces (Note: juwae is the word for "fighter" in the local Malay dialect. End note). The Khok Pho police confirmed for us that three of the six killed had outstanding arrest warrants. Although Sunai could not confirm whether the police knew who the insurgents were initially, or whether they simply got lucky, Sunai said the insurgents in Pattani would nevertheless retaliate against the government, a sentiment also shared by Chaoyong Maniraksakun, chairman of the Journalists Association of Thailand's Songkhla branch. Officials said insurgents set fire to the municipal administration office on November 18 as the first act of revenge for the shootout. Sunai also noted that the municipality where the standoff occurred had been a breeding ground for hardline insurgents since 2004; Ismae Rayalong--also known as Ustadz Soh, an influential religious teacher--recruited from the area those attackers who participated in the attack on April 28, 2004 that ended when soldiers massacred those who had taken refuge in the Krue Se mosque.

DESPITE PROPOSALS NO POLITICAL SOLUTION IN SIGHT

17. (U) Former head of the CNS and coup-leader retired General Sonthi Boonyaratkalin made his long-anticipated civilian foray into politics on November 18 when he was introduced as the new head of the Mathaphum Party. General Sonthi, himself a Thai Muslim, appeared with Mathaphum's members of the Wadah faction who have strong political influence in the Malay

Muslim Deep South. Almost immediately after the press conference, Sonthi gave an interview to the Bangkok Post in which he proposed a "new ministry" to coordinate and manage government affairs in the South. (Note: the word he used, "thabuang", connotes a government bureau which is usually headed by someone with the title of minister. End note.) This idea--which had been extensively researched by a team of academics at the Mahidol University's peace institute--would work, he said, because it would put one person in charge of overseeing the work of the various government agencies operating in the South.

18. (C) While Sonthi's proposal is more detailed than the Pattani City scheme put forward by Puea Thai Chair Chavalit (REF A), it is an enhanced governance idea that has been bouncing around for some time, even among those in government circles. As with the Pattani City idea, the "thabuang" scheme appears to be geared towards winning electoral points for the next election cycle. Dr. Chitchanok Rahimmula, a specialist on the Southern insurgency at Prince of Songkhla University's Pattani campus, told us the current situation was a mess precisely because each agency worked independently and there was a lack of coordinated guidance. Chaoyong of the Journalists Association of Thailand told us the various proposals were toys used by policymakers and local elites to draw public attention, but people at the grassroots level did not understand the ideas.

ARMY CLAIMS SUFFICIENCY ECONOMY HELPS QUELL INSURGENCY

19. (U) Fourth Army commander Lt. Gen. Phichet Wisaijorn, in a presentation at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT) on November 18, focused on the RTA's efforts to implement King Bhumibol's sufficiency economy model in the Deep South. He said the real problem in the South was the lack of agricultural development. Helping the predominantly agrarian South develop better agricultural processes in line

BANGKOK 00002955 003.2 OF 003

with the King's sufficiency economy, he said, had helped to reduce the incidents of violence. Gen. Phichet claimed that, compared with 2008, the number of violent incidents this year had gone down from over 700 incidents to just over 500.

(Note: this claim does not square with statistics from Deep South Watch which indicated an increase in the number of attacks for this year, after a deep drop between the 2006-07 plateau and 2008's lower levels. See REF B-C. End note.) The RTA had also worked to create understanding with the locals and reduce the lack of trust in the South, he said.

110. (C) Note: Gen. Phichet's remarks, both during his presentation and the Q&A session were indicative of the general approach favored by the Thai Government in addressing the Southern problem. Gen. Phichet did not acknowledge the deep-seated ethnic and historical differences felt by the Malay Muslims in the Deep South. He said he told his soldiers not to focus on history, but just do good works and follow the King's sufficiency economy model to resolve the concerns. Gen. Phichet paid lip service to the idea of ensuring that justice was served for soldiers who abused locals, but according to Chaoyong the continued lack of resolution over the incidents at Krue Se, Tak Bai, and Al Furqon remained as sore spots for the population in the South.

JOHN